



The common vocational training policy in the EEC from 1961 to 1972

Introduction

Article 128 of the EEC Treaty signed in Rome in March 1957 stated that the Council of Ministers of the Community would lay down, based on a proposal of the Commission and after consulting the Economic and Social Committee (ESC), 'general principles for implementing a common vocational training policy capable of contributing to the harmonious development both of the national economies and of the common market'. Article 118 also included basic and advanced vocational training as one of the matters for which the Commission was given the task 'of promoting close cooperation between Member States'. Article 41 specifically referred to vocational training in the agricultural sector, stating that there should be 'effective coordination of efforts in the spheres of vocational training ... (that) may include joint financing of projects or institutions' (1). These were followed by a series of measures (in particular those on the mobility of workers in employment, exchanges of young workers, etc.) which, without explicitly mentioning the adoption of a common policy, could be regarded as indirect legal sources for Community competence in matters of vocational training (2).

It can be stated, then, that the EEC Treaty provided a solid legal base for a Commission initiative directed towards establishing a common policy on vocational training for the workers of the Member States. Such measures were a practical response above all to the demands of those countries with the most pressing economic and social prob-

lems. Italy in particular hoped to find in the Community an instrument for solving the structural problems by which its society was beset, at least in part. Foremost among those problems was what seemed to be endemic unemployment in the less economically advanced areas of the country (3). With this in mind, a common vocational training policy could be seen as of great value in facilitating the job integration and retraining of a significant proportion of the body of unemployed people, especially bearing in mind that the Italian training system was not so highly developed as in some of the other Member States. The economic and social interests of one of the Member States - one of the three 'major' States, perhaps not so much politically as in geographical, demographic and economic terms - together with the concern of the newly created Commission to establish itself as the driving force for integration, at least in those fields in which it had been given specific responsibilities by the Treaty, were all pressures to move in the direction of setting up a common vocational training policy. As stated by the member of the Commission who followed most closely the vicissitudes of vocational training in the 1960s, Lionello Levi Sandri from Italy: '... these are important provisions in the general context of the European Community's social policy since ... it is the only case in which the Treaty makes provision on this subject, in its Article 128, for a common vocational training policy. This enables the Community to make every effort to establish a genuine, adequate common policy, unlike its other interventions, which may in a sense appear to be weaker' (4).



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While Article 128 of the Treaty of Rome very clearly states that a common policy for vocational training should be developed, this policy has never come to fruition. This is largely due to resistance from Germany and France, which already possessed highly developed vocational training systems. But the failure can also be attributed to the clash between the centralising forces of European development, revealed by the Commission's attempts to take the lead in financing common policies, and the opposing government forces that seek to limit the Commission's ambitions and defend their sovereignty. As a result, attempts to formulate a common policy for vocational training have been abandoned: France and Germany are not at all keen to take on the costs of retraining the southern Italian labour force.

(1) For quotations from the Treaty, see Historical Archives of the European Communities, hereinafter ASCE, BAC 173/1995, 2824, EEC Commission, *Principi generali per l'attuazione di una politica comune di formazione professionale* [General principles for implementing a common vocational training policy], 26/9/1961.

(2) In particular the Commission cited as indirect sources Articles 49, 50, 57 and 131 of the Treaty of Rome, plus Article 3 of the Implementing Convention on the association of the overseas countries and territories with the Community and the provisions of the Protocol on Italy. See ASCE, BAC 173/1995, 2822, EEC Commission, *Principes généraux pour la mise en œuvre d'une politique commune de formation professionnelle - Projet* [General principles for implementing a common vocational training policy - Draft], 8/2/1961.

(3) On the Italian position on European integration, see Varsori, 1999.

(4) ASCE, BAC 7/1986, 1618. *Exposé de M. Levi Sandri devant le Comité économique et social* [Address by Mr Levi Sandri to the Economic and Social Committee], 1/3/1962.



Would, then, the allied interests of Italy and of the EEC Commission succeed in imposing an 'interventionist' line, in other words one in which the Community institutions and mechanisms would perform a decisive role in vocational training? The reply to this question, at least as regards the years with which we are concerned, is 'no'. Let us try to understand why this came to pass.

The ten principles of 1963

On 12 May 1960 the Council, on a proposal of the Commission, decided to accelerate the implementation of the Treaty of Rome ⁽⁵⁾. Vocational training was chosen as one of the sectors in which steps would be taken ahead of the schedule for implementing the provisions of the Treaty. After consulting the competent national authorities and representatives of the trade unions and employers, between February and September 1961 the Commission, with the support of the Italian representatives in the Community bodies ⁽⁶⁾, succeeded in laying down the content of the general principles on training, as required by Article 128, setting their number at 10 ⁽⁷⁾. These principles were to be the foundation on which a common line for the six countries was to be constructed. We shall not go into each of those principles in detail here, but we shall look at the more important aspects to shed light on the Commission's action guidelines, and we shall then analyse how the Community reacted.

The general objective to be achieved through a common social policy was, in the mind of the Commission, not only higher productivity and greater economic integration pure and simple but, above all the moral and material advancement of workers, so as to associate them in a positive way with the process of integration and its institutions. The development of vocational training in the Member States through a policy of intervention by the authorities therefore came to be seen as crucially important in achieving a form of integration consonant with the social goals set by the Treaty ⁽⁸⁾. In a situation in which there was a chronic shortage of skilled labour and technicians side by side with the persistence of high unemployment rates in certain regions of the Community, the importance of vocational training in improving workers' living conditions was all too evident: it represented 'a link between demographic and technological development' ⁽⁹⁾. Of course attempts

could be made to solve the problem of skilled labour shortages by means of intergovernmental agreements or the intervention of the newly created European Social Fund, but, according to Levi Sandri: 'the Community's economic policy and above all its social policy call rather for a vocational training policy ... which, as the Treaty intends, must be a common policy' ⁽¹⁰⁾.

Thus the general principles were conceived not in the abstract, not in theory, but as 'precepts that must be effectively imposed on the activity of States' ⁽¹¹⁾.

As the Commission stated clearly on this subject: to plan for a common vocational training policy when its principles are not binding on the Member States would in practice be tantamount to not establishing a common vocational training policy at all. It is clear that the term 'general principles' entails rules of conduct and the idea of a tangible result to be achieved. The act to be adopted, therefore, is of such a nature as to be binding on the Member States by virtue of the general obligation imposed on them by Article 5; it ensures that, in matters of vocational training, the Member States must align their attitudes and their actions with the general principles that are to be laid down ⁽¹²⁾.

On several occasions the Commission made an effort to stress the mandatory nature of the principles laid down pursuant to Article 128, in an obvious attempt to exclude any likelihood that Governments might apply them according to their national rules and each country in the light of its own priorities, which would have rendered the very idea of a common policy meaningless.

Regarding the long-term outlook, Levi Sandri said he was in full agreement with Maria Weber, the representative of German unions on the ECS, on the idea that, in the transitional period of establishing the common market, an irreversible process should be started up that would bring the Member States up to a common level of vocational training ⁽¹³⁾. This gradual harmonisation of their training systems called for the development of actions based on common programmes and initiatives; in consequence the Commission should have assumed the role of a true prime mover of the common policy rather than that of a mere coordinator of the Member States' initiatives. In the words of Levi Sandri: 'One cannot accept certain proposals

⁽⁴⁾ See Gerbet, 1994; p. 214. See also ASCE, CM2/1960, 46. Exposé fait par M. Petrilli au cours de la 37e session du Conseil [Address by Mr Petrilli during the 37th session of the Council], 27/9/1960.

⁽⁵⁾ See ASCE, BAC 173/1995, 2822, Coreper - Extrait du procès verbal, problèmes relatifs à l'accélération [Extract from the minutes, problems relating to acceleration], 14/7/1961, stating that 'the Italian Representative confirmed his Government's interest in the early presentation of a Commission proposal establishing general principles for implementing a common vocational training policy'.

⁽⁶⁾ For the final version of the principles see *Principi generali per l'attuazione di una politica comune di formazione professionale* [General principles for implementing a common vocational training policy], 26/9/1961, *op. cit.*

⁽⁷⁾ General principles for implementing a common vocational training policy - Draft, 8/2/1961, *op. cit.*, in particular pp. 7-8, on the economic and social foundations for the Commission action. It is of interest that the document stressed that the improvement of working conditions could not be left solely to the workings of the free market which, 'according to economic theory and experience', would have accentuated the economic and social imbalances existing in the Community. Neither, moreover, would an 'authoritarian' labour policy have been acceptable. All things considered, a common vocational training policy was the most suitable means 'of creating a social situation as a precursor to an employment policy meeting the general objectives of the Treaty'.

⁽⁸⁾ *Idem*.

⁽⁹⁾ Exposé de M. Levi Sandri devant le Comité économique et social [Address by Mr Levi Sandri to the Economic and Social Committee], 1/3/1962, *op. cit.*

⁽¹⁰⁾ *Idem*.

⁽¹¹⁾ General principles for implementing a common vocational training policy, 26/9/1961, *op. cit.*

⁽¹²⁾ Exposé de M. Levi Sandri devant le Comité économique et social [Address by Mr Levi Sandri to the Economic and Social Committee], 1/3/1962, *op. cit.*



that would reduce these [the Commission's] powers, proposals that would probably compromise the very implementation of the common policy.' ⁽¹⁴⁾

This 'active' concept of the Commission's role was embodied in the fourth principle, according to which the Commission, to ensure the implementation of the common vocational training policy, was to: 'make concrete proposals to the Council, adopt any other appropriate initiative, indicate the order of priority of actions, monitor their development, arrange for their coordination and verify their results' ⁽¹⁵⁾.

In particular the Community executive could formulate common study and research programmes and in general propose 'practical realisations' whose implementation would be entrusted to the Member States 'on its [the Commission's] impetus' (in the French version, 'sous son impulsion'), in virtually unlimited time and space, since both short- and long-term projects were discussed, relating both to individual national situations and to the Community as a whole ⁽¹⁶⁾. The same principle provided for the creation of an advisory committee on vocational training, consisting of an equal number of representatives of the competent national authorities, trade unions and employers' associations, with the task of assisting the Commission in its action in this field.

Incidentally, it is of interest that in the first version of the principles, dated February 1961 (the final version was approved in September), the fourth principle also included the creation of a European information, documentation and research centre whose terms of reference were to disseminate documentation and information on vocational training, and to study, as directed by the Commission, technical questions associated with the realisation of a common policy ⁽¹⁷⁾. This wording disappeared in subsequent versions, in which the Commission itself absorbed en bloc the functions that had in principle been assigned to the European centre for vocational training.

As is apparent the Commission had lofty ambitions, which were received with some perplexity even in those circles most in favour of more integrationist ideas.

In the European Parliament (whose opinion, although not required by Article 128, was

nonetheless sought by the Council, in response to pressure from the Commission) ⁽¹⁸⁾, some MEPs raised the problem of respecting specific national characteristics in education, stating that 'the EEC cannot go further than permitted by the established structures in the Member States' ⁽¹⁹⁾. Levi Sandri, who was present during the debate, assured the Assembly that the Commission 'does not intend to interfere with problems that come within the purview of Member States'.

The ESC (whose opinion was not a requirement but was sought, as for the Parliament) expressed doubts as the Advisory Committee specified under the fourth principle might in some way be marginalised by an over-partisan Commission. Here again, Levi Sandri intervened to give an assurance that the Commission intended to 'proceed in close contact with the categories concerned' ⁽²⁰⁾.

Despite the doubts generated by certain aspects of the proposal, it can be stated that on the whole the two institutions supported the Commission's grand design. Both expressed favourable opinions, although many amendments to the text presented by the Commission were suggested, especially by the Assembly ⁽²¹⁾. Nevertheless, as regards the key point of the project, the Commission's power of initiative, the report presented by the Parliament's Social Committee emphasised: 'the vital importance of the action of initiative and incentive assigned to the Executive body of the EEC for the implementation of the common policy. ... It is essential to give the EEC Commission powers enabling it to adopt initiatives of common interest.' ⁽²²⁾.

In other words, the European Parliament came out in full support of the idea of a leading role for the Commission in the sphere of common vocational training policies, including its right of initiative.

Reactions from the Governments were naturally very different. Almost a year after the European Parliament had given its opinion, a delay that was found surprising in Community circles ⁽²³⁾, the Council finally examined the draft principles at a meeting on 21 February 1963 ⁽²⁴⁾. On that occasion the Ministers of Labour were given the task of representing their Governments. The Commission was represented by its President, Walter Hallstein, and by Levi Sandri. The discussion focused on the wording of the fourth principle. There were two opposing ideas,

⁽¹⁴⁾ Idem.

⁽¹⁵⁾ General principles for implementing a common vocational training policy, 26/9/1961, op. cit.

⁽¹⁶⁾ Idem.

⁽¹⁷⁾ General principles for implementing a common vocational training policy - Draft, 8/2/1961, op. cit.

⁽¹⁸⁾ See ASCE, CM2/1961 57. Procès verbal de la 53e session du Conseil de la CEE [Minutes of the 53rd session of the EEC Council], Brussels 23-25/10/1961. The 10 principles were officially brought to the attention of the Council on 3 October 1961. See ASCE, BAC 26/1969, 140. Letter from Mr Hallstein to the President of the EEC Council, 3/10/1961. Note that in his letter Mr Hallstein asked the Council to discuss the principles as early as at the meeting of 23 October next, demonstrating both the priority that the Commission attached to the question and perhaps an under-estimate of the resistance that the planned principles might arouse among national governments. In the October session, the Council did not enter into the merits of the principles but merely gave its unanimous approval to the idea of consulting the Parliamentary Assembly and the ESC.

⁽¹⁹⁾ ASCE, BAC 7/1986, 1618. Note d'information-Consultation relative à la proposition de la Commission [Information-Consultation note on the Commission proposal], 4/4/1962, in which there is a summary of the debate in the Assembly. The meeting of the Parliamentary Assembly was held on 30 March.

⁽²⁰⁾ See as regards the debate in the ESC: ASCE, BAC 7/1986, 1618. Compte-rendu des délibérations XXe session [Minutes of the discussions in the 20th session], 1/3/1962. The statements by Levi Sandri are in: Exposé de M. Levi Sandri devant le Comité économique et social [Mr Levi Sandri's address to the Economic and Social Committee], 1/3/1962, op. cit.

⁽²¹⁾ See the amended text of the principles as proposed by the Assembly in ASCE, BAC 7/1986, 1618. Consultation demandée par le Conseil de la CEE à l'Assemblée Parlementaire Européenne [Consultation requested by the EEC Council of the European Parliamentary Assembly], 2/4/1962.

⁽²²⁾ ASCE, BAC 26/1969, 142, APE, Report on behalf of the Social Committee, 21/3/1962. See also the reports on the Commission debates in ASCE, BAC 173/1995, 2829. Nevertheless, the Assembly remained more cautious about the Commission's powers of initiative. It is significant that, in the wording of the fourth principle, the Parliament had proposed replacing the expression *sous son impulsion* [on its impetus] by the words *sur sa demande* [at its request], with reference to the Commission's action in dealings with Member States in the performance of the projects formulated by itself.

⁽²³⁾ See the written question submitted on 29 October 1962 by the Dutch Socialist Deputy, Mr Nederhorst, the Chairman of the European Assembly's Social Committee, to find out the reasons for the delay, and the Commission reply on 29 December 1962, in ASCE, BAC 1/1970, 638.

⁽²⁴⁾ ASCEM CN2/1963, 0009. Procès verbal de la 96e session du Conseil de la CEE tenue à Bruxelles le 21/2/1963 [Minutes of the 96th session of the EEC Council held in Brussels on 21/1/1963], 26/4/1963.



one of them ruling out the competence of the Community institutions for the formulation and application of vocational training policies, the other affirming that competence. The French Minister Mr Grandval and, even more decisively, the German Minister Mr Blank, were the spokesmen for the former argument. According to the French Minister, the Commission seemed 'to have the intention of going beyond its function of guiding the policies of Member States and to want to take direct action within national economies'. In Mr Blank's opinion, it was advisable for 'the Commission to content itself ... with making its views and opinions known to the Member States; it would then be for the Member States to act in due awareness of the facts'. Unless this was accepted, Germany could not give its consent to a text authorising the Commission to make proposals to the Council that the Council, according to the dictates of the Treaty, could reject only by a unanimous agreement. To avoid this possibility, the German Government proposed that the Commission might make proposals on vocational training only to the Member States. In this way, each State would retain its freedom to choose whether or not to follow the Commission's guidance. As the German Minister stated: 'In matters of vocational training, the Member States are competent: any text not recognising this situation would go beyond the Treaty.'⁽²⁵⁾

In addition to their views on the question of competence, the French and German delegations stated their opposition to the wording of the 10th principle, which provided for joint financing for certain types of measures directed towards attaining the objectives of the vocational training policy. According to the two ministers, this provision should be excluded, leaving it to the discretion of individual countries to choose the means of funding.

The Commission's project also found supporters within the Council. The firmest support for the arguments put forward by the Commissioners came from Italy. In the light of the considerations described above, the reasons for that support can readily be understood: Italy was the country with the greatest interest in the creation of a genuinely common policy on vocational training, especially with the prospect that it might lead to the harmonisation of national training standards for workers in employment, a pre-

requisite for the free movement of workers in the common market - one of Italy's main objectives in taking part in European integration.⁽²⁶⁾ As a result, in the face of Franco-German resistance, the Italian Minister, Mr Bertinelli, put forward a compromise formula to the effect that the Commission could present its proposals to the Council in the first instance and, 'depending on the circumstances', to the Member States as well.

After a prolonged debate culminating in the replacement of the word 'proposals' by the word 'measures', which the French delegation saw as less binding and of more limited legal scope, the Council came to vote on a text that incorporated the compromise solution put forward by the Italians. Four delegations voted in favour, and two - the French and the German - against. With regard to the question of the funds to back the common policy, approval was given - again with the French and German delegations voting against - to the Netherlands' proposal, i.e. that vocational training policy 'could' become the object of joint funding, but in essence that the decision on the methods of funding would be deferred to a later date.

The 1965 Action Programme

After a difficult run-up period the final version of the principles was adopted by the Council in a decision of 2 April 1963. In a second decision reached on 18 December 1963, the Council approved the statutes of the Advisory Committee on Vocational Training.⁽²⁷⁾ The Committee consisted of 36 members, i.e. 2 government representatives, 2 union representatives and 2 employers' representatives per Member State. It was chaired by a representative of the Commission. Levi Sandri, who in the meanwhile had become Vice President of the Commission, took on this task for the first few years of the Committee's work. The address by Levi Sandri himself on the occasion of the first meeting of the Committee, on 29 June 1964, gives a comprehensive picture of the Commission's vocational training programmes following the approval of the general principles.⁽²⁸⁾

According to the Vice President of the Commission, the common training policy was to be the outcome of concerted action of Member States and Community institutions based on the general principles. The first step would be to lay down guidelines for Community interventions, setting an order of priority in the

⁽²⁵⁾ *Idem*.

⁽²⁶⁾ On the relations between European integration and emigration policies in Italian politics, see Romero, 1991 and 1993.

⁽²⁷⁾ See the documentation in ASCE, BAC 64/1984, 969 and BAC 6/1977, 679.

⁽²⁸⁾ ASCE, BAC 26/1969, 467. Advisory Committee on Vocational Training (ACVT). Discours introductif prononcé par M. Levi Sandri [introductory address by Mr Levi Sandri], 29/6/1964.

⁽²⁹⁾ *Idem*.

⁽³⁰⁾ For example, Levi Sandri recalled, based on the proposals formulated by the Commission, on 8 May 1964 the first common programme for the exchange of young workers was approved. Levi Sandri also mentioned a whole series of initiatives designed to establish collaboration in the field of information and research on vocational training with national bodies (such as the University of Frankfurt and Cologne, the Humanitarian Society of Milan) and international bodies (Centre d'information sur la formation professionnelle in Geneva, an organisation closely linked with the ILO). The Commission then embarked wholeheartedly in 1964 on organising an international conference on vocational training, held in Brussels from 16 to 20 November 1964. See the conference proceedings in ASCE, BAC 1/1970, 637 and ASCE, BAC 26/1969, 467, Note d'information concernant le Colloque sur la formation professionnelle [Information note on the vocational training colloquium on vocational training], 23/9/1964.

⁽³¹⁾ ASCE, BAC 6/1977, 679. Projet de programme d'action en matière de politique commune de formation professionnelle [Draft action programme on a common vocational training policy], 1964, but undated.



light of the principles and establishing the more pressing needs. With this in mind, declared Levi Sandri, 'the Commission intends to act as a catalyst for the will of Member States' (29). In particular, pursuant to the fifth principle, it would be the responsibility of the Commission to set up a permanent network for exchange of information among Member States and between them and the Commission, to promote the fruitful pooling of experience with the various vocational training programmes set up at national level. But above all, according to the Italian Commissioner, the aim of the Community action should be the development of training systems and their adaptation in line with economic change and technical progress. Levi Sandri made a point of recalling all the efforts that had been made by the Commission up to that moment (30), but he felt that the time was now ripe for more structured action, for putting the 10 principles into practice. In the Commission's opinion, because the principles were generic and often theoretical, there was a need for 'the objectives of the common vocational training policy and the procedures adopted to attain the ESC objectives to be specified and prioritised ... by defining a general guideline for the action envisaged and by outlining a framework in which that action should be placed.' (31).

To achieve that objective, over 1964 the Commission devoted itself to drafting an Action Programme on common vocational training policy (divided into two parts, one more specifically on agriculture, the other on other fields of work). The end objective of the common action, as defined in the Action Programme, was to establish a system offering 'all young people of the Community, and when necessary adults, an appropriate opportunity for training' (32). The Programme was intended, as was explicitly stated in the general considerations, to be an intermediate stage between the 10 principles and the concrete proposals that the Commission would be presenting to the Council or Member States. A set of short- and long-term actions was planned that should make it possible: 'gradually to implement a common VT policy that might contribute to the harmonious development of both national economies and the common market, accelerate the raising of living standards and improve the prospects of employment for workers, whether in employment or self-employed' (33).

Under the short-term measures the aim was

essentially to promote, through training and retraining, the use of the potential resources of manpower within the Community, as well as the transfer of workers from sectors in which there was a surplus of labour towards those where there were shortages. To this end, there were plans for the development and improvement of Community initiatives aimed at creating accelerated training programmes for adult workers.

Among the long-term measures, the document placed priority on developing training structures, programmes and methods, particularly in developing regions and those at risk of economic decline. To achieve this, importance was attached to training teaching staff and instructors and to permanent training of the work force, so that there could be an adequate response to the demands created by technological advances.

Another priority indicated in the document was the harmonisation of training standards, a result that was 'one of the fundamental objectives of the common policy', in the words of Levi Sandri (34), so that the principle of the freedom of movement of workers and the right of establishment could apply in full. In consequence, harmonisation should relate in the first place to those occupations and qualifications that accounted for the highest rates of emigration within the Community.

In May 1965, after consulting the Advisory Committee, the Commission adopted the Action Programme, which was submitted to other Community institutions for consideration (35). The Parliament gave its favourable opinion in March 1966 (36). In May that year, one of the working groups coming under the Council of Ministers, the Group on social questions, examined the document (37). Within the Group, the German and Netherlands delegations observed that the breakdown of responsibilities between the Community and the Member States had not been made sufficiently clear in the action programme. For its part, the French delegation formally stated its reservations, observing that the Commission proposals went beyond the field of vocational training proper in certain significant aspects. In the opinion of the French delegation, they extended to questions that were the exclusive competence of Member States (relating in particular to employment policy, policy on school education and regional policy). The French delegation pointed out that some of the actions envisaged raised problems of fund-

(28) *Idem*.

(29) ASCE, BAC 6/1977, 685. Programme d'action en matière de politique commune de formation professionnelle en général [Action programme on a common vocational training policy in general], un-dated.

(30) CCFP. Discours introductif prononcé par M. Levi Sandri [Introductory speech by Mr Levi Sandri], 29/6/1964, *op. cit.*

(31) ASCE, BAC 26/1969, 468. Discours introductif prononcé par M. Levi Sandri [Extract from the minutes of the 316th meeting of the Commission], 5/5/1965. ASCE, BAC 6/1977, 685, CCFP. Avis sur le Programme d'action en matière de politique commune de formation professionnelle [Opinion on the action programme on the common vocational training policy], 19/3/1965.

(32) See the documentation in ASCE, BAC 26/1969, 469. The Parliament's favourable opinion was issued on 11 March 1966.

(33) ASCE, BAC 26/1969, 469. Working Party on Social Questions, Note-Action programmes established by the Commission, 9/5/1966.

(34) ASCE, BAC 26/1969, 469. Texte proposé par la délégation italienne [Text proposed by the Italian delegation], 21/9/1966.

(35) See the declarations by the Commission representative to Coreper in ASCE, CM/AI 31452. Note-Programmes d'action établis par la Commission [Note-Action Programmes established by the Commission], Coreper Meeting 5/10/1966. See also ASCE, BAC 7/1986, 1619. Note à l'attention de MM. les membres de la Commission [Note for the attention of Commission members], 14/10/1966.



ing, and for this reason the Programme could only be in the nature of guidance, since any concrete commitments would have required a unanimous decision by the Governments. Along these lines, the delegation proposed that Governments come to an agreement on concrete initiatives, without defining a general doctrine on funding. In the same spirit, Germany expressed the view that it was preferable not to adopt a specific position on all the actions covered by the Programme but to do so on a case-by-case basis. This was clearly an attempt by the Governments to impose compartmentalisation of the Commission's projects in such a way as to exclude any form of supranationality.

The Italian delegation alone rallied to the defence of the Commission's approach, expressing the opinion that the Council should not confine itself merely to taking note of the Programme. Italy proposed that a draft declaration be presented to the Permanent Representatives Committee (Coreper) to the effect that the Council stressed on the one hand the need to maintain an overall vision of the vocational training initiatives and, on the other, the value of an action leading to the mutual recognition of occupational qualifications to facilitate free movement of workers. According to the declaration proposed by the Italians, the Council should call on the Commission to present it with projects that would enable the Action Programme to be implemented ⁽³⁸⁾. The Italian position did not gain support from the other delegations. The Commission itself stated that it would withdraw the request for the Council to deliberate on its Programme, whose indicative and general nature - it affirmed - it recognised ⁽³⁹⁾. Given that position, Italy softened its position and withdrew its requests. The Council merely took note of the Action Programme, without discussing it.

What was the reason for this retreat by the Commission? In my opinion, the explanation is to be sought in two kinds of factors. In the first place, the general political climate: we were in the period immediately following the end of the 'empty chair' crisis that was resolved by the Luxembourg compromise (e.g. Gerbet, 1994, pp. 269-284). It may therefore be assumed that the change in the Commission's attitude was also due to its defeat in the confrontation with France. On reflection, France's intransigence too can be interpreted as a consequence of the institutional crisis of the previous months. Se-

condly, part of the explanation can be traced back to events more closely linked with vocational training, specifically the failure of the Commission's first concrete initiative in this field.

In late June 1965, a few weeks after the action programme was presented, the Commission forwarded a proposed decision to the Council, to be adopted by a majority, on implementing an accelerated vocational training programme ⁽⁴⁰⁾. The Commission intended the initiative as at least a partial response to a real problem. It should be borne in mind that in 1964 there was a serious shortage of manpower in some of the countries of 'little Europe': in Germany, for example, 600 000 jobs were unfilled due to lack of skilled manpower. In Italy, on the contrary, according to the official figures there were 1 200 000 unemployed people. As the Commission wrote: 'There are currently acute shortages of skilled labour in the Community and ... they are so great as to compromise the balanced expansion of the Community economy ... Italy alone is in a position to offer a surplus work force that could be trained to take up jobs in the other Member States.' ⁽⁴¹⁾.

From a legal and political viewpoint, the Commission's proposal was based not only on its recently launched Action Programme but also on the general principles, more specifically - as pointed out in the preliminary statement in the proposal - on the 4th and 10th principles, in other words those under heaviest fire from the Governments. The pressure originated from the Advisory Committee which, in its favourable opinion on the Action Programme delivered in March, had pointed out the need to study measures that would contribute towards eliminating existing imbalances on the labour market and had recommended the 'implementation of special accelerated vocational training programmes in the light of shortages of skilled manpower and surpluses of unskilled workers' ⁽⁴²⁾. The Committee expressly suggested proceeding with implementing an accelerated vocational training programme.

Accepting the Committee's opinion, the Commission drew up a training programme for 3 000 Italian workers aged up to 35 who were prepared to seek employment in the building, metallurgical and hotel industries in a Member State other than their own. The courses were to last from eight months to a

⁽⁴⁰⁾ ASCE, BAC 26/1969, 468. Proposition de décision du Conseil présentée par la Commission au Conseil [Proposed Council decision presented by the Commission to the Council], 29/6/1965, attachment, Levi Sandri to Couve de Murville, 1/7/1965.

⁽⁴¹⁾ *Idem*.

⁽⁴²⁾ Advisory Committee on Vocational Training. Avis sur le Programme d'action en matière de politique commune de formation professionnelle [Opinion on the action programme on the common vocational training policy], 19/3/1965, *op. cit.*

⁽⁴³⁾ There were plans to make available to the initiative a budget with an upper limit of slightly over 6 million units of account, broken down as follows: approximately 1 700 000 u.a. for 1965, the balance to be spent in 1966.

⁽⁴⁴⁾ See ASCE, BAC 26/1969, 469. Council, Note-Proposed Council decision, 3/5/1966.

⁽⁴⁵⁾ *Idem*.

⁽⁴⁶⁾ In this hypothesis, due to ESF funding mechanisms, the quota to be borne by Italy would be increased by 85 %, whereas the quota for France and Germany would be reduced by 20 % and 42 % respectively.



year depending on the sector of employment and were to be held partly in Italy and partly in France and Belgium. The participants were to be entitled to pay and conditions that were equivalent, in France and Belgium, to those of their own workers attending public vocational training centres. For Italy the terms of remuneration specified included, in addition to the monthly indemnity, a bonus payable on completing the course and a contribution towards the person's transfer abroad. The funding required in implementing the programme was to be charged against the Community budget (43).

The Commission's plans came up against the opposition of the Governments, here again with the exception of Italy. In the debate within the Working Party on Social Questions held over the course of six meetings from the end of March to late April 1966, nobody disputed the social and economic advisability of the proposal (44). What gave rise to the strongest opposition were the political and financial implications of the project. As the Italian delegation pointed out, this particular initiative was of great political significance, going far beyond the frankly modest impact that it might have on conditions on the labour markets: if it became reality, it would be the first concrete Community measure in vocational training to be implemented by common funding, establishing a significant precedent (45). But for the very reason of ruling out any Community competence in what was regarded as the sole domain of national governments, the other delegations proposed that the Commission programme be shelved and that in its place a series of multilateral or bilateral agreements between Italy and the other Member States be reached, or that there should be recourse to the Social Fund. Besides the question of principle as regards competence, underlying the dispute there was also the problem of sharing the costs entailed in setting up the programme. Under the system proposed by the Commission, the burden would be shared in equal parts among the three largest countries, with a significant contribution from the others. If recourse were to be made to the Social Fund, Italy would have had to foot only half of the necessary expenditure (46).

Faced with such opposition, the proposal foundered and was replaced by a series of intergovernmental agreements. This repre-

sented a complete failure of the Commission's attempt to propose itself as the driving force of a common vocational training policy.

In the years that followed, the Commission redirected its efforts to less ambitious objectives of more limited scope. The focus was on studying measures for the harmonisation of vocational qualifications, in application of the eighth general principle. This was an undertaking that, if extended to all labour markets, would have placed an excessive burden on the limited structures and competences available to the Community. It was therefore decided to concentrate the efforts of the Commission and the Advisory Committee on occupations occupied by a large number of people, which were of concern to the Community as a whole and which were of some importance in terms of freedom of movement (47). Based on these three criteria, the industries selected were engineering and building. The objective was to draw up a Community list of the skills required in each trade and to promote its adoption at national level. In 1967 the Commission sent the Council a preliminary proposal on the qualifications for an 'average-level turner'. This was followed by the qualifications of a 'milling machine setter-operator' and a 'grinding machine operator', the three lists being combined into a single Occupational monograph for the training of skilled machine tool workers.

But even in such a technical context, the Commission's work had to reckon with the opposition of the French Government, which disputed the chosen method on the grounds that it might lead to the undervaluation of specific national characteristics and a crystallisation of the skills required to work in trades subject to constant technological change. According to the French delegation in the Working Party on Social Questions: 'The Commission's project in practice aims to lay down a single content that Member States should give to training. Fixing an average level would, therefore, create serious problems for the Member States, which would continue to be responsible for establishing and adapting standards to be imposed on the various vocational training systems' (48).

Because of the French opposition, the work of the Commission was suspended in July 1968 by a Council decision, until such time

(43) See ASCE, CM/AI 31457, Council. *Nota-Formazione professionale: raccinamento progressivo dei livelli di formazione* [Note-Vocational training: gradual harmonisation of training standards], 15/12/1967, summarising the statements of a Commission representative to the Working Party on Social Questions on the state of the art as regards the harmonisation of training levels. See also ASCE, BAC 64/1984, 969. *L'action des Communautés européennes en faveur de l'harmonisation de la formation professionnelle* [The action of the European Communities in favour of the harmonisation of vocational training], 9/10/1968. This is the text of the statement by the Commission's Director General for the Social Affairs, Mr Vink, at a conference organised by the European institute for vocational training.

(44) See ASCE, CM/AI 31457. *Note-Formation professionnelle: rapprochement progressif des niveaux de formation* [Note-vocational training: gradual harmonisation of training standards], 23/1/1968.

(45) See ASCE, CM/AI 31457. *Extrait du procès verbal de la 44e session du Conseil* [Extract from the minutes of the 44th session of the Council], 9/7/1968, taking note of the conclusions reached by the Working Party on Social Questions in ASCE, BAC 173/1995, 2840, *Note-Formation professionnelle: rapprochement progressif des niveaux de formation* [Note-Vocational Training: gradual harmonisation of training standards] 17/7/1968.

(46) ASCE, CM2/1969, 50. *Procès verbal de la 90e session du Conseil* [Minutes of the 90th meeting of the Council], 24-25/11/1969.

(47) See ASCE, CM/AI 31441. *Conclusioni e suggerimenti presentati dalla Commissione al Consiglio dopo lo scambio di opinioni del 25/11/1969* [Conclusions and suggestions presented by the Commission to the Council after the exchange of opinions of 25/11/1969], 20/4/1970, enclosure to Bodson, V. (member of the Commission) to Harmel, P. (President of the EEC Council), 24/4/1970 and the Commission intervention reported in ASCE, CM/AI 31389, *Note-Travaux dans le domaine de la formation professionnelle* [Note-Work in the field of vocational training], 8/7/1970.

(48) ASCE, CM/AI 31389. *Note du Gouvernement français sur les activités communautaires en matière de formation professionnelle* [French Government Note on Community activities in matters of vocational training], 16/11/1970.



as a working method could be established that was accepted by all the delegations ⁽⁴⁹⁾. As a result the Community action ultimately came to a true impasse at the end of the decade.

The 1972 Action Programme

The impasse was overcome, at least in part, in late November 1969, a few days before the Hague Conference. The Council met to discuss the situation on the labour markets in the Community. The exchange of ideas among the Ministers, at which Levi Sandri was also present, highlighted the persisting shortage of skilled labour in industry in every Member State and the existence of pockets of long-term unemployment, at a time when unemployment rates were generally falling ⁽⁵⁰⁾. There was a consensus among the Ministers on the stress on the importance of vocational training in maintaining a qualitative and quantitative equilibrium on the labour market, and they stated their agreement as to the need to develop studies and research, encouraging the exchange of experience at Community level. The Italian delegation called for an intensification of the efforts to arrive at more specific commitments at the Community level. At the end of the session, the Council approved a declaration calling on the Commission to present its assessment and suggestions regarding vocational training for adults.

The Commission presented its proposals in April 1970. At the Community level, the Commission suggested developing statistical instruments, intensifying the exchange of information and experience and improving the coordination of research undertaken by the Member States ⁽⁵¹⁾. It will be noted that the outlook had changed from the high ambitions of the early 1960s. The only exception to this low-profile policy was the proposal to consider the possibility, suggested by the ESC, of setting up a European Institute for the scientific study of vocational training.

In November the French Government, in response to the Commission's tentative proposals, presented a note on the Community's activities on the subject of training, and this became the basis for the initiatives that were to be introduced over the next three years ⁽⁵²⁾. In its document the French Government set out a severe critique of Community activities in vocational training. In particular the general principles were criticised for

their over-generic nature, which had made it impossible to arrive at 'many practical achievements or those of appreciable interest'; the paper glossed over the contribution that had been made to that disappointing result by the resistance of the governments.

According to the French Government, a new programme of activities should be established with the aim of developing the exchange of information and harmonisation of training standards.

There should be a new basis for pursuing the second objective compared with the past; in other words, the approach should no longer be to take every single qualification into consideration but to look at more general groups of trades and functions, the aim being a constantly evolving description of new working methods rather than a static record of practices that were bound to age very rapidly.

Lastly, France proposed that common actions be conducted in sectors which by their nature required international cooperation or had particularly close associations with Community policies. More specifically, the following were indicated as possible fields for common action:

- (a) language learning for emigrant workers;
- (b) the production of special teaching instruments (such as computers and simulators);
- (c) collaboration on or the exchange of radio and television programmes;
- (d) the development of Community programmes for training in trades in which new problems are arising in connection with technological developments (such as information technology, numerical control machine tools, etc.).

The other delegations received the French proposals favourably ⁽⁵³⁾. It is of interest that the German delegation agreed fully with the negative assessment of the general principles of 1963 and the initiatives that ensued and that nonetheless, rather than sheltering behind the generic criticism of their abstract nature, to a certain extent it ultimately acknowledged the true reason for their failure: 'ESC principles attempt to define above all a number of competences and convey the

⁽⁴⁹⁾ See the debate within the Group for Social Questions in ASCE, CM/AI 31389, Note-Work in the field of vocational training, 11/1/1971.

⁽⁵⁰⁾ *Idem*. See also ASCE, CM/AI 31459, Note-Opinion of the German delegation on the work in the field of vocational training, 24/2/1971.

⁽⁵¹⁾ ASCE, CM/AI 30661. General guidelines for the formulation of a programme of activities at Community level on vocational training, 27/7/1971. For the debate within the Working Party on Social Questions, see the voluminous documentation in ASCE, CM/AI 31459.

⁽⁵²⁾ ASCE, CM/AI 31416. First measures for the implementation of a common vocational training policy, 25/10/1972.

⁽⁵³⁾ ASCE, CM/AI 31419. European Parliament, Report drawn up on behalf of the Committee on social affairs and employment, 5/6/1973.

⁽⁵⁴⁾ *Idem*.



impression that it is only the Commission that can take effective action ... This approach could not lead to satisfactory results ..., and it would moreover be wise not to refer back to certain action programmes that the Commission has formulated in the past.' (54).

Based on the French note, an intensive debate developed within the Working Party on Social Questions, leading to the Council's adoption of a document containing basic guidelines for possible Community action in vocational training (55). These guidelines, which to a great extent reflected the ideas put forward by the French delegation, were accepted in full by the Commission, which took it as a basis for a new action programme that first saw the light in October 1972 (56). It should be noted how the decision-making process had been reversed compared to the past: now the Commission followed on in turn, after the Governments had taken the initiative. As pointed out by the Report of the European Parliament's Social Committee, the new document represented a step backward from the programme of 1965 (57). The scope of the measures envisaged was modest, mainly consisting of promoting cooperation and the exchange of ideas and information among Member States. Obviously there was no provision for any independent action on the part of the Commission. Moreover, the author of the report noted, the Commission itself, in implicitly admitting that the programme was limited, suggested that it be integrated into a future plan of action for the purpose of implementing the common vocational training policy, including it in the framework of the social action programme whose preparation had been entrusted to the Commission by the Paris summit of October 1972 (58).

In a few months' time the socio-political climate within the Community was to change drastically. The economic crisis that signalled the end of the 'golden age' of capitalism was to force Western societies to confront a range of problems, and many of what had seemed to be accepted findings were being challenged again. In this new and difficult situation, which forced the States to think about different ways of overcoming it, some of the projects devised in the early 1960s were taken up again. One of these was the idea, included in the first version of the general principles, of creating a European vocational training institute.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I would like to go back to the question I asked at the beginning: why, during the first decade of the Community's life, did the attempts to breathe life into a common vocational training policy fail?

One could find various explanations by following the traces of the succession of events over the period in consideration: opposition from certain Member States, who were reluctant to cede their national powers to the Community in a sector that, however secondary it might seem, in fact involved substantial interests in countries such as Germany and France whose vocational training was highly developed; a measure of imprudence on the part of the Commission, which was unable to keep the over-integrationist pressures under control and thus aroused hostility among the Governments towards projects judged to be too 'audacious'. And again, the projects presented by the Commission could be studied in detail to reveal the weaknesses and shortcomings that were part of the reasons for them foundering.

But the basic reason, and the aspect that makes the study of a relatively secondary element of European construction significant, is one seemingly so far from the heart of the crucial political issues: that the same forces were in play in vocational training as those that determined the course of integration at higher levels. In other words, in the microcosm represented by the attempts to construct a common vocational training policy we can trace the effects of the omnipresent dialectic between intergovernmental momentum and supranational pressures. For instance, in the early years of the decade we see a Commission trying to emerge as an equal partner with the individual nations, one way being its affirmation of its competence in matters of training, as well as in the familiar matters of the funding of common policies, commercial policy, etc. This attempt provoked reactions from some of the Governments, which in turn restricted the scale of the Commission's ambitions. This produced the 'empty chair' policy and, on the more 'modest' level with which we are concerned here, a true boycott of the application of the general principles that were to have guided common vocational training policy and the other Commission initiatives in this field. At the end of the decade, with the new phase launched by the Hague Conference and continuing in so-



cial policy, due to the pressure of the crisis that put an end to the '30 glorious years', with the Action Programme of 1974, discussions started again – albeit on a different footing from the past – on common training policy. In addition, in parallel with the Community dialectic between institutions and governments, a clash of national interests ran alongside and became intertwined with that dialectic. In the course of these events, the

weakest party, Italy, succumbed to the hostility of France and Germany, who were obviously reluctant to take on the financial burdens to restore a social balance for Italy or to relinquish their sovereignty in what was evidently deemed to be an important sector, in spite of the technicality of many issues, since it would affect the prospects for the lives of their citizens and voters.

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